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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000490

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SUBJECT: FM ON REGIONAL CONFERENCE, TURKEY, IRAN, AND RECENT TRAVEL

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: During a February 6 meeting, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoshyar al-Zebari and the Ambassador discussed an upcoming regional conference the MFA intends to host; current issues the GOI has with Turkey, Iran and Syria; and the FM's recent travels to Italy and Davos. The FM reiterated previous statements that Baghdad should be the site for an upcoming regional conference, but agreed that several key players - including the Saudis and the Egyptians - are "dragging their feet" about attending. Expressing his "displeasure" with recent statements from the Turkish government and lackluster response to goodwill gestures, Zebari stated that he would not be surprised if the GOT took military action in the future. He stated that the Iranians understand they can no longer act with impunity within Iraq and stated that the Iraqi cabinet recently approved transforming Iranian liaison offices into official consulates. The FM concluded with an update on his recent travel and noted that the Italian government has pledged 400 million Euros to project-based civilian assistance. End Summary.

IRAQ'S "RIGHT" TO HOST A CONFERENCE; NEIGHBORS HESITANT

¶2. (S) The FM noted that he intends to move forward with a regional conference March 11-12. He said that during his upcoming travel to Saudi Arabia (February 12) he will encourage them to attend; Turkey, Syria and Iran have already agreed to the conference. He noted that Jordan will attend as long as Saudi Arabia and Egypt send representatives. Kuwait has suggested, and the Arab League concurs, that the conference should be delayed until after the Arab League's scheduled March 28 meeting. The UN and the OIC have both said they would attend, according to the FM. If the majority of regional players are engaged, he concluded, others will also attend.

¶3. (S) The Ambassador responded that regional Foreign Ministers may not attend the planned Baghdad-based conference. But he recognized that it is "Iraq's right to host the next meeting," and suggested that perhaps an Ambassadorial- level meeting in Baghdad. The Ambassador said that in his meetings with the Saudi Foreign Minister he understood that the Saudi FM does not want to travel to Baghdad. But we will encourage the Saudis to send an envoy to the Baghdad meeting. The Ambassador noted that it would be a "powerful message" to have a meeting in Baghdad.

IRAQI-TURKISH RELATIONS STRAINED; TURKISH RHETORIC INCREASING

¶4. (S) The FM noted that he had spoken with Turkish FM Gul and expressed "displeasure" for the comments Turkey has recently made concerning Kirkuk, the PKK and other issues.

The Turks are not cooperating on trilateral meetings, an idea which had been developed to show goodwill, he said. In mid-February a delegation from the KRG, including Kurdish PM Nechirvan Barzani, will travel to Turkey in another effort to improve relations. Zebari commended "good steps" taken at the Makhmour refugee camp, but pointed out that the Turks are not allowing women and children to return. He predicated that the Turks will do "something," although dismissed a land attack. "I do not know when or how," he said, but an air attack is possible.

¶ 15. (S) The Ambassador replied that Turkish rhetoric is due to upcoming elections in Turkey and noted that the PM, who wants to be President, needs the support of Turkish nationalists. He agreed that the Turks need to take steps on an amnesty program and that by continuing to press on Kirkuk the Turks were being counter-productive. Furthermore, the Ambassador said, he is pushing for General Ralston, the special envoy for PKK issues, to increase his engagement. It would be helpful, the Ambassador concluded, if the PUK and KDP could take additional political steps and push the PKK to reiterate their ceasefire.

IRAN UNDERSTANDS NEW REALITY; PM "DISRUPTS" PROGRESS ON SYRIA

¶ 16. (S) The FM raised quickly the Iranian diplomat arrested in Baghdad. He said that the Iraqi Police arrested four individuals who used to be with Iraqi Special Forces. Zebari said he spoke with the Minister of Defense who confirmed the four individuals used to work for the special forces. He noted that the PM is "determined" to "get to the bottom" of this incident. Turning to the five Iranians arrested January

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11 in Erbil, Zebari said that in a meeting with the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq he had warned him against sending Quds Forces into the country. "If you do that," he cautioned, the GOI "will not be able to protect you." He assessed that Iran has "received the message." The FM said that the cabinet had approved transforming Iranian liaison offices, such as the one where the five men were arrested in January, into official consulates.

¶ 17. (S) On Syria, the FM noted that relations had been proceeding well but the PM has "disrupted" the progress. He noted that Sunni leader Harith al-Dari had provoked the PM. The PM had taken this "personally" which is why GOI spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh made statements that 50 percent of those people and materials coming into Baghdad are entering through the Iraq-Syria border.

THE FM'S TRAVELS: ITALY OFFERS FINANCIAL AID; TALKS WITH IAEA

¶ 18. (S) The Foreign Minister briefed on his recent travels to Italy and Davos and discussions on the International Compact for Iraq. The Italians, he said, have promised to transform their military aid to civilian assistance and have pledged 400 million Euros over three years in project-oriented support. In Davos, the FM noted that he is going to work with IAEA to close remaining files, commenting that Iraq remains "under sanctions." The FM said he had positive discussions with IAEA Director General Mohamed al-Baradei and concluded that resolution would be possible.

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